

# NORMA

*Vincenzo Bellini*

*A Concert Performance of  
Bellini's Masterpiece*

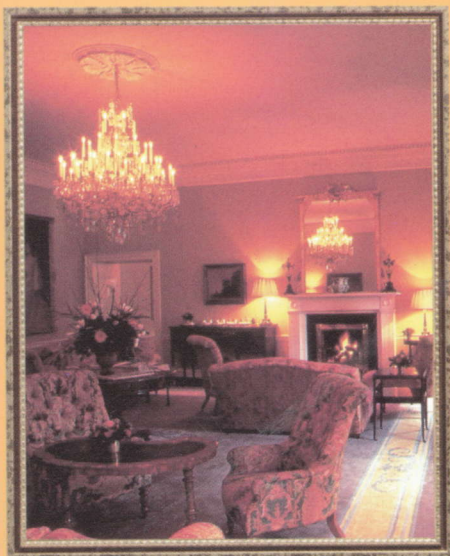
19, 21, 22 November 2003  
at The Gaiety Theatre



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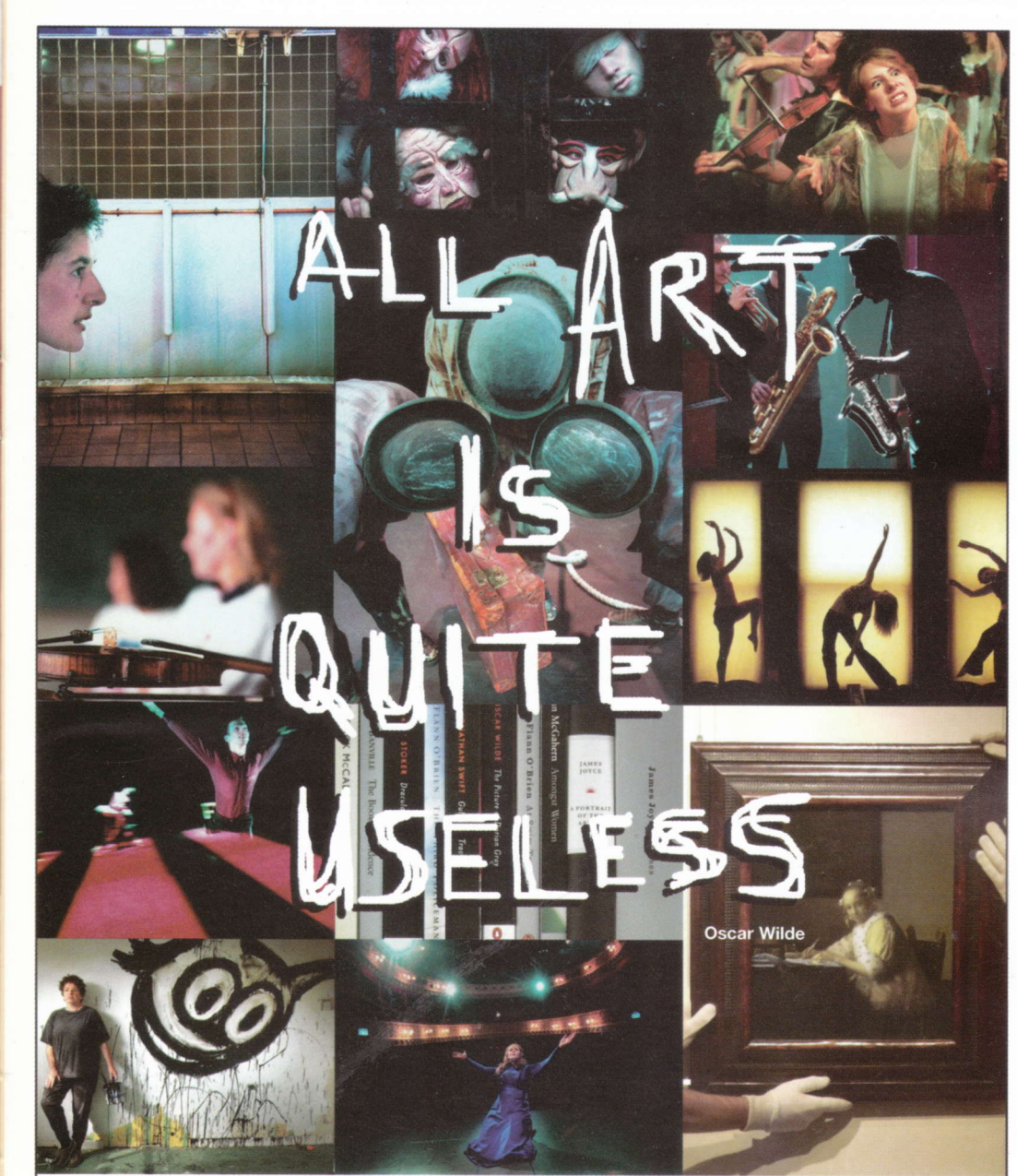
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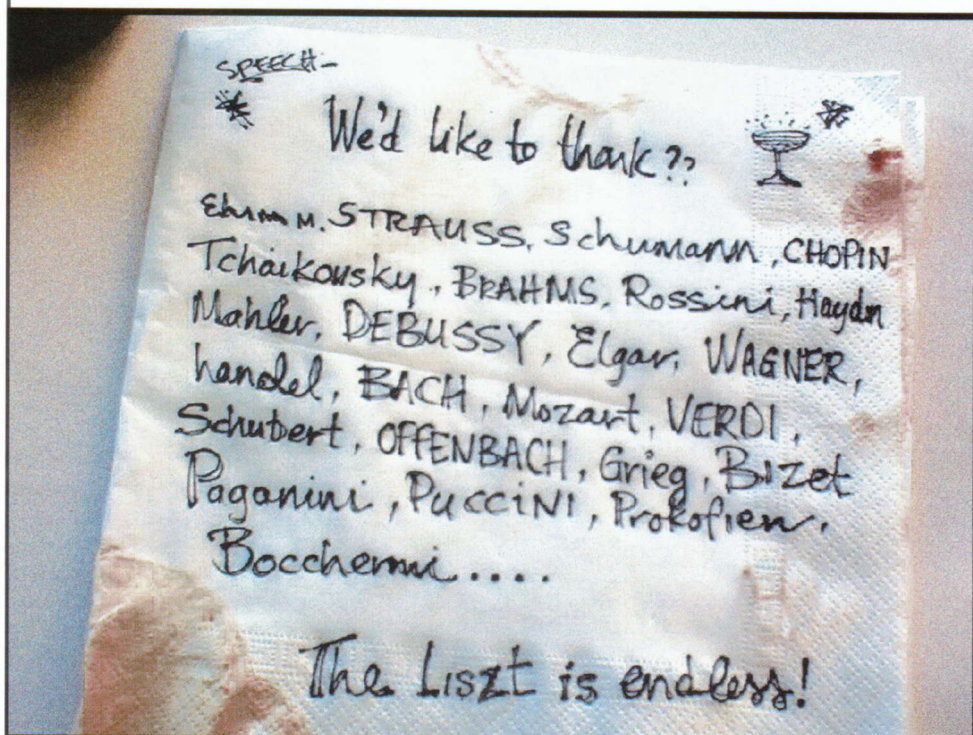
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presents

# Norma

Vincenzo Bellini

Lyric tragedy in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

Sung in Italian with English Surtitles

**Conductor**

Laurent Wagner

**Pollione**

Keith Olsen

**Orovese**

Carlo Cigni

**Norma**

Regina Nathan

**Adalgisa**

Patricia Fernandez

**Clotilda**

Sandra Oman

**Flavio**

Roberto Covatta

RTE Concert Orchestra (Leader: Therese Timoney)

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**Opera Ireland Chorus**

**Chorus Master: Cathal Garvey**

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THEATRE

Gaiety Theatre Dublin

19th, 21st & 22nd November 2003.

*There will be a twenty minute interval after Act 1*

**Surtitles Translation:**

Jonathan Burton



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## Pasta Diva

Norma is considered to be one of the most taxing of all soprano roles. It calls for great dramatic ability, deep emotional resources, and, especially, a thorough *bel canto* technique. The original Norma, Giuditta Pasta, is known to have had great difficulty with the music. It seems that, notwithstanding her great interpretive gifts, she was a very uneven singer and had insufficient technical command over her voice, which showed itself mainly in extremely poor intonation. Indeed, there are contemporary accounts of her pitch being so wayward that the violins had to play out of tune to keep with her, while the wind instruments simply stopped playing.

According to Richard Bonyngne, Pasta found "Casta diva" unsuited to her voice and did not wish to sing it. We are told that Bellini discarded eight versions of the cavatina before arriving at the one we know today. Even then, Pasta claimed she could not manage it. But Bellini told her to sing it once each morning for a week and see what happened. It worked; although the diva insisted on having the key transposed down a tone below the original G major.

Other famous Normas in the 19th century were Giulia Grisi (the original Adalgisa), Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Jenny Lind, Therese Tietjens and Lilli Lehmann. In the last century the most successful interpreters included Rosa Ponselle, Rosa Raisa, Gina Cigna, Zinka Milanov, Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland, and Montserrat Caballé.

Caterina Mancini was the first DGOS Norma, at the Gaiety Theatre in 1955. Since then the role has been undertaken by Lucille Udovich in 1961, Lynne Strow Piccolo in 1981 and Suzanne Murphy in 1989.

*Norma is considered to be one of the most taxing of all soprano roles. It calls for great dramatic ability, deep emotional resources, and, especially, a thorough bel canto technique.*





# A Score That Speaks to the Heart

'I admire in *Norma* the rich melodic vein expressing the most intimate passions with a sense of profound reality; a great score that speaks to the heart, a work of genius.' The words were those of Richard Wagner, a man not usually known for his appreciation of Italian opera.

Of all the ten stage works he composed, *Norma* was Bellini's own favourite. He once said: 'If I were shipwrecked at sea, I would leave all the rest of my operas and try to save *Norma*.' Most of the music for *Norma* was written at Blevio on Lake Como, where Bellini was the guest of Giuditta Pasta, the soprano who was to create the title role. Apparently she and Romani, the librettist, inspired Bellini to work.

Incredible as it may seem, the opera that had been awaited by the Milanese as the most important event of the season, was a disastrous failure at its premiere at La Scala on 26 December 1831. The composer Giovanni Pacini observed that he saw Bellini 'shed a few tears', and Bellini himself wrote to his friend and biographer Florino that he was greatly discouraged. Possibly one of the main reasons for the fiasco was the introduction of certain innovations to the traditional form of Italian opera, the most important of which was undoubtedly the replacement of the *finale primo*, or the great choral scene at the end of the first act, with a splendid but simple trio. However, there was a much better reception at the second performance, and that enthusiasm continued as the opera took off throughout Italy and beyond. It reached London in 1833 and within another two years was being played as far away as New Orleans.

Dublin first heard *Norma* on the eve of St Patrick's Day in 1836 when it was performed at the first Theatre Royal in Hawkins Street with Mme Sinkloth in the title role and Mme Paltari as Adalgisa. When the opera was revived at the same venue in August 1841, the role of Norma was sung by Giulia Grisi, who had been Bellini's original Adalgisa. On this occasion the younger priestess was sung by Grisi's sister Ernesta, and the cast also included two celebrated male singers, the tenor Mario and the French-Irish bass Luigi Lablache.

*Norma* has been translated into almost every language and continues to be performed all over the world. It is generally considered Bellini's masterpiece and one of the most important operas in the development of the genre. Back to Wagner: 'The poetry of *Norma* reaches the heights of Greek tragedy; and the closed forms of Italian opera, which Bellini ennobles and elevates, provide a contrast to the solemn and grandiose character of the whole. All the passions, so remarkably transfigured by the melody, are set against a majestic background from which they do not waver, but take shape within a large clear framework that unintentionally reminds us of Gluck and Spontini.'



*'I admire in Norma the rich melodic vein expressing the most intimate passions with a sense of profound reality; a great score that speaks to the heart, a work of genius.'*



## The Apostle of Lyricism



Vincenzo Bellini was one of the masters of Italian opera. His art differed sharply from that of his celebrated contemporaries, Rossini and Donizetti, both of whom were at home with comedy as well as tragedy. Bellini was primarily the apostle of beautiful lyricism. He did not have a pronounced dramatic feeling, and his skill at harmony and instrumentation was limited. But his gift of song was unrivaled. His melodies were perfect in design and structure, aristocratic in style, varied in expression, and endowed with genuine feelings. Lyricism served his every emotional and dramatic need.

Bellini was born in Catania, Sicily, on November 3, 1801. The descendant of a long line of musicians, he was given an early musical training by his father. In 1819 he enrolled at the Conservatorio di San Sebastiano in Naples. While still a student there he wrote his first opera *Adelson e Salvini*. The work, which is set in 17th century Ireland, had its premiere in December 1825 and prompted the impresario Domenico Barbaja to commission *Bianca e Gerardo* - later revised as *Bianca e Fernando* - for performance at the San Carlo the following year. This brought a second commission from Barbaja, this time for Milan. The new opera, *Il pirata*, introduced at La Scala in 1827, was a triumph. His next two operas, *La straniera* (Milan 1829) and *Zaira* (Parma 1929), were less well received; but he achieved true greatness with *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Venice 1830) and *La sonnambula* (Milan 1831). Bellini's masterpiece, *Norma*, followed at La Scala on December 26 1831, and this was followed by the less successful *Beatrice di Tenda* at Venice in 1833. In that same year he visited London to attend performances of several of his operas. His next destination was Paris. Here, encouraged by Rossini, he wrote his last opera, *I Puritani*, for the Théâtre des Italiens. After its successful premiere, on January 25, 1835, Bellini withdrew to a secluded villa to work on two new operas. Here he was stricken by intestinal fever which proved fatal. He died on 23 September 1835.

*His melodies were perfect in design and structure, aristocratic in style, varied in expression, and endowed with genuine feelings.*





## Cast Biographies



### **Carlo Cigni - Bass (Italy) *Oroveso***

Born in Livorno in 1966, Carlo Cigni studied singing at the Arrigo Boito School of Music in Parma and made his operatic debut in 1995 in Cimarosa's *Gli sposi per accidenti*. Since then he has appeared in Palermo, Teatro Comunale in Florence, Rome, Macerata, Naples, Munich, Strasbourg, Marseille, Lyon, Montpellier and Athens as well as at the Torre del Lago Puccini Festival and on tour in Japan. He has sung in *La Bobème*, *Carmen*, *Tosca*, *Cenerentola*, *Il borgomastro di Sardaam*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Nabucco*, *Alabor in Granata*, *Don Giovanni*, *La serva padrona* (Pergolesi and Paisiello), *La traviata*, *La sonnambula*, *Les Troyens*, *Il maestro di cappella*, *Il trovatore*, *La memoria perduta*, *Macbeth*, *Il marito disperato*, *Turandot*, *Otello* and *Marion Delorme*. In concert he has sung in Mozart's *Requiem* and Puccini's *Messa di gloria* as well as in the symphony season at the Teatro Filarmonico in Verona and with the Orchestra di Fiesole and Academia di Santa Cecilia.



### **Roberto Covatta - Tenor (Italy) *Flavio***

Born in Torino in 1973, Roberto Covatta has been studying with the Genoese soprano Rosetta Noli since 1998. From then until 2001 he was a member of the chorus at the Teatro Regio in Turin and at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. He made his solo debut as Dr Cajus in Verdi's *Falstaff* at the 27th Cantiere Internazionale d'arte Montepulciano at Teatro Poliziano last year. In the current year he has sung Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* at Teatro Modena (Genoa) and Rodolfo in *La Bobème* at Teatro Bonci (Cesena). His repertoire also includes Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*, Alfredo in *La traviata*, and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*.



### **Patricia Fernandez - Mezzo-soprano (France) *Adalgisa***

Patricia Fernandez has previously sung Rosina, Suzuki and Carmen for Opera Ireland. She studied at the Cannes Conservatory and Ecole d'Art Lyrique of the Paris Opéra. At the Opéra-Comique she has sung Rossini's Isolier and Cimarosa's Fidelma, Kate in *Owen Wingrave* and Giacinta in *La finta semplice*, among others. In 1998 she made her debut as Mozart's Cherubino at the Festival de Saint-Céré and returned as Rosina the following year. In 1999/2000 season she sang Carmen at the Hong-Kong Festival and in *Louise* at the Théâtre de Châtelet in Paris. In July 2000 she made her Aix-en-Provence debut as Cenerentola. She has also sung Suzuki in Rennes and Tours and Verdi's Meg Page with the Nancy Opera in Caen. Other roles in her repertoire include Le Tambour in Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, the Third Servant in *Elektra* and Annio in *La clemenza di Tito*. This season she has sung in *Les Saltimbanques*, *Comte Ory*, *Jackie O* and *Die Zauberflöte* in Metz. She will soon make her Rennes debut as Mélisande.



### **Regina Nathan - Soprano (Ireland) *Norma***

Regina Nathan has sung major lyric soprano roles throughout her operatic career. Opera Ireland has heard her as Susanna, Zerlina, Mimi, Butterfly, Antonia, Violetta and Cleopatra. She has sung Susanna for Glyndebourne Touring Opera; Mimi in Lucerne; Zdenka in *Arabella* under de Waart at the Concertgebouw; Violetta for Opéra de Nante; Gretel for Scottish Opera; Donizetti's Adina for Israeli Opera; and Amelia in Verdi's *Ballo* for Opéra de Rennes. She has also sung in opera in Madrid, Brussels, Hamburg and Geneva. Concert engagements have included Mahler's 4th Symphony and Mozart's *Exultate Jubilate* in Brussels; Mahler's 8th Symphony at the Concertgebouw and Royal Albert Hall; Beethoven's 9th Symphony and *Exultate Jubilate* with the Israel Chamber Orchestra; and Rachmaninov's *The Bells* at London's RFH. In 1998 she performed at the opening concert for the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur. Her recordings include Britten songs (Hyperion), Mahler's 8th Symphony (BMG) and Donizetti's *Maria de Rudenz* (Opera Rara). She has also recorded a solo album *With Love*.



### **Keith Olsen - Tenor (USA) *Pollione***

Keith Olsen's career has seen him appear regularly in the world's most prestigious opera venues. These include London's Royal Opera (*Katya Kabanova* with Haitink, *Tosca* with Domingo conducting, *Aida*, *Butterfly*, *Bobème*) Paris Bastille (*Tosca* with Ozawa, *Boccanegra* with Myung-Whun Chung, *Butterfly*, *Bobème*); La Scala, Milan (*Fedora*, *Vita* - world premiere); *Fanciulla del West* tour to Japan; Staatsoper Wien (*Tosca*); Staatsoper Berlin (*Trovatore*, *L'Africaine*, *Aida*); and Verona (*Aida*, *Carmen*, *Butterfly*, *Bobème*). He has recorded Verdi's *Requiem* and Handel's *Rodrigo* for EMI and *La Damnation of Faust* for Bayer. He will soon release *Aida* on a Mawa DVD. Keith Olsen's eight years of formal education has earned him numerous recognitions, including the Grace Moore Graduate Fellowship in Voice/Opera (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Master of Music) and a scholarship during his four years at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (Bachelor of Music). At New York's Julliard School of Music he culminated his studies with two years in the professional studies programme.



### **Sandra Oman - Soprano (Ireland) *Clothilde***

Sandra Oman studied with Edith Forrest and Alison Young at the Dublin College of Music, with Graziella Sciutti in London and Conor Farren in Dublin. She also attended masterclasses with Carlo Bergonzi in Italy. She has performed in opera and concert in Ireland, UK, USA, Italy, Faroe Islands and Poland. Last year she sang Puccini's *Musetta* with Co-Opera in 54 performances nationwide. She repeated the role last month for Lyric Opera at the NCH. She has also sung roles in *Covi fan tutte*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Carmen*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Albert Herrling*, *Nabucco*, *Aida*, *Macbeth*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Suor Angelica*, *Die lustige Witwe*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *La Bobème*, *Don Carlo*, *Pagliacci*, *Idomeneo* and *L'elisir d'amore* with Opera Ireland, Opera South, Opera Interludes and Opera in the Open. In concert she has appeared with major Irish choral societies in works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, John Rutter, Rossini, Haydn and Fauré. Forthcoming engagements include *Gilda* for Lyric opera at the NCH in 2004.





### **Laurent Wagner (France) Conductor**

Laurent Wagner, who has previously conducted *Salome*, *Katya Kabanova* and *Fliegende Holländer* for Opera Ireland, was recently appointed Principal Conductor of the RTÉCO. Born in Lyon, he studied piano, bassoon, harmony and chamber music there before joining the Kapellmeister class of Professor Österreicher in Vienna in 1982. He built up a large repertoire as Kapellmeister at various German opera houses, including contemporary works (world premiere of the Hiller/Ende *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, D'Argento's *The Voyage*). Then he was appointed General Music Director of the Saar State Opera in Saarbrücken, where he programmed and performed works like Messian's *Turangalila* Symphony, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* and Berg's *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*. He also conducted Berg's complete orchestral works. His main interests are the German symphonic repertoire and German and Italian opera. Besides his post with the RTÉCO and as Opera Director in St Gallen, he works regularly as guest conductor, mainly in Europe, although he has also conducted in Tokyo, Beijing and Sao Paulo.



### **Cathal Garvey (Ireland) Chorus Master**

Cathal Garvey made his Opera Ireland debut as Chorus Master for *Boris Godunov* in 1999, and has since earned critical acclaim for his work on *Aida*, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *The Silver Tassie*, *Carmen*, *Andrea Chenier* and *The Queen of Spades* among others. Born in Cork, he began violin and piano studies at the age of eight. He continued at the Cork School of Music and later read Music at UCC. As a conductor, Cathal Garvey has worked with the RTÉCO, the National Symphony Orchestra, and several choirs and orchestras in Cork. From 1997, he was Chorus Master and Assistant Conductor for Opera South in Cork, working on productions of *La Bobème* and *Il trovatore*. In 1999, he conducted IORC's successful run of *Me and My Girl* in Cork and Dublin. He has acted as Chorus Master for Anna Livia Opera and the Dun Laoghaire Choral Society and currently works with Lyric Opera Productions.

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Pauline Frizelle\*

Nicola Hendy

Niamh O'Connell\*

Niamh O'Hanlon

Zane Senavska\*

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Tom Creagan  
Warwick Harte\*  
Alan Leech\*  
Niall McGrath\*  
Cormac McNamara

Jacek Wislowski\*

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Desmond Caplis\*  
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The new BMW 5 series. Model featured BMW 530iSE with optional 18" alloy wheels\*, Bi-Xenon headlights, Dynamic Drive and Active Steering. Head-up Display available as an option from March 2004. Fuel consumption figures for the 5 Series range: Extra Urban 51.4 – 35.8mpg (5.5 – 7.91/100km). Urban 29.7 – 17.3mpg (9.5 – 16.31/100km). Combined 40.9 – 25.9mpg (6.9 – 10.91/100km). \*17" alloy wheels are standard.